

# Castlemaine Naturalist

April 2015

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Blue crab, Christmas Island photo by Judy Leitch

## **Carpet Weed – a threatening weed is with us.**

Ern Perkins

Carpet Weed *Galenia pubescens* is an abundant weed near Melbourne and is an emerging weed in Castlemaine. Many infestations can be seen along the railway line near Diggers Rest and it is very abundant along the Geelong line. Carpet Weed is a member of the pigface family. As its common name suggests, it carpets (densely) other vegetation. Several years ago, I removed a single plant from a Castlemaine property – the one plant filled four garbage bags. (right)

There are two large plants growing on the railway embankment beside Bruce Street. One is on the slope beside the access ramp and the other is on the ramp.



It is quick growing. On the 19th January this year I found 11 plants growing in Castlemaine. They were recent arrivals, possibly germinating after the January rains. They were certainly not there at Christmas. This gave an opportunity to measure their growth rate. I took weekly measurements (on 19, 26 Jan and 2 Feb) of greatest length and width of each plant. On the 9th February I found that they had all been weeded out, so the measurements stopped. The largest increased its area from 0.53 square metres to 1.17 square metres. The second smallest increased from 96 square centimetres to 1288 square centimetres, a 13 times increase. On average, the plants doubled the area covered during the two weeks. The measurements were taken as the soil was drying out, which reduced the growth rate.



*Galenia pubescens*



at Belmont golf course 2010

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## **Rare orchids in their own backyard**

Noel Young

At the March meeting former members of this club Robin and Phil Collier presented a summation of the monitoring and experiments carried out on their northern Tasmanian property since moving there in 2007. It consists of a fairly well preserved remnant of coastal vegetation in central north Tasmania and is one of over 700 properties in Tasmania with conservation covenants.

Located 2 km from the Rubicon estuary and about 10 km from Bass Strait it features patches of woodlands separated by ephemeral wetlands, and has yielded many surprises such as more than 20 species of *Thelymitra* (sun-orchids)

With some 50 species of orchids found on the property, Robin and Phil decided that their conservation priority would be the protection of threatened plant species. The abundance of many of these it was realised, was related to past disturbance, mainly burning by previous owners. As disturbance is essential for the promulgation of many, the question of what sort of disturbance and how often had to be answered.

Unfortunately, disturbance also promotes weeds. An annual cycle of activities was quickly established. In the early part of the year, clearing by slashing amongst the treed areas, and selective burning of the open areas was followed up in September/ October by a lot of weeding, especially around the periphery to control influx of exotics from surrounding farms.

The cycle of activity basically consists disturbance, weeding and monitoring, which involves a huge amount of work. We were shown illustrations detailing how they went about all these activities. For instance every orchid was given a brass marker, and carefully measured and recorded to track its progress. After a fire the tags can be located with a

metal detector. 1200 plants are measured and recorded three times a year.

Phil went into some detail on the identification of rare *Prasophyllum* orchid species on the property using methodical measurements of all plants. Close observation of orchid growth over multiple years has indicated the best frequency of disturbance to use. A typical pattern is that flowering peaks in the year following disturbance, after which the recurrence drops off fairly rapidly. Many other details rounded out a fascinating address, reflected by the significant number of questions from a very interested audience. George suggested there could be a PhD in it, but the reply was that these require the research to be done in 3 years, but when 15 years has passed "we may write a book". We should hold them to that.

## **Cocos and Christmas Islands**

Nigel Harland

Many of you will know that I stopped twitching a year or so ago, but I twitched the Long-billed Dowitcher near Kerang late last year and that released some of the urges, which had been slightly hidden from view. At the same time I heard that the December trip to the Cocos and Christmas Islands had seen 7 birds that were new to me, so I managed to get Anne and I on the February trip. Recent trips have indicated that most of the rarities occur on Cocos, so that is where we stopped first.

Cocos is the most scenic of the two islands, in fact Cocos is an archipelago comprising many different islands, only two of which are inhabited. The main island is West Island and it contains the airstrip and a few houses and a motel. The other inhabited island is Home Island which is inhabited mainly by Malayan people and the current owners of the Clunies Ross house which has been under reconstruction for many years since the Clunies Ross family left. There are several other islands in the archipelago, many of which are worth a visit and these can be arranged by locals on West Island.

Just before we departed there were reports of a Western Osprey on West Island, so 20 minutes after we landed, we set off to try and find it. It took perhaps 10 minutes and we had seen a first for Australia. We waded out as far as we could in knee high water before it decided it was time to depart.

It took another two days to find a second new bird for me, which was a Chinese Sparrowhawk. This bird was on the original list of seven and was seen relatively well. Things were going well, but that is where it came to an end. No more new birds on Cocos, but I cannot overemphasise the beauty of the place. If anyone was thinking of going, I would thoroughly

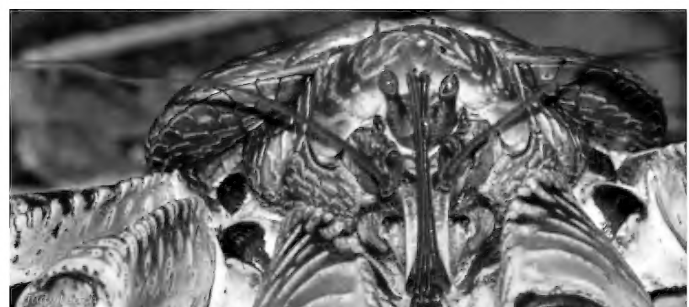
recommend it as a scenic pleasure. Although we didn't participate this time, snorkelling is just as good as the scenery above ground.

So we headed for Christmas Island, where we were to stay for a few more days. The plane flight is just over an hour and we arrived after dark. Even so the Owls and Nightjars would have to wait! Christmas Island is much bigger than Cocos, being some 20km long and 15km wide. There are many more places to go and birds are much more difficult to find. We had three cars and split up to cover all areas of the island. There are some 11 endemic birds on the two islands and most can be found relatively easily on Christmas Island.

The nearest we got to finding a rarity was in a pool above a permanent waterfall on the west of the island. There were four of us there and one flushed a Bittern in front of the other three. There were two possibilities – a Cinnamon Bittern and a Von Schrenk's Bittern. The view was cursory and there is little difference between the two species, but we decided that, on balance, it was a Von Schrenk's. This would have been a new bird for me, but the problem was that one of the group managed a very blurry photo and this is currently under scrutiny by ornithological experts. Time will tell.

We left after a most enjoyable experience even though we didn't achieve the number of rarities seen previously. That just means I'll have to go again on trip number seven! The photos shown are some of the birds we saw and I obtained them from one of our group, Judy Leitch, to whom I am very grateful.

Christmas Island Goshawk, Great Frigatebird, and Robber Crab



Red Crab



Golden Plover bird



White Tern



Green Junglefowl



Red-footed Booby

## **A visit to the Rise and Shine**

Noel Young

The March 15 outing of the Friends of Box Ironbark Forests to the R&S reserve south of Newstead, was a bird watching affair, led by none less than Geoff Park, who addressed the February meeting of this club.

The reserve is a known bird 'hot spot', and with several able bird observers in the group, we listed the following birds for the morning

Red Wattlebird	Willy Wagtail
White-browed Babbler	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
White-plumed Honeyeater	Fuscous Honeyeater
Black-chinned Honeyeater	Crimson Rosella
Mudlark	Brown Treecreeper
White-throated Treecreeper	Striated Pardalote
Spotted Pardalote	Dusky Woodswallow
Hooded Robin	Scarlet Robin
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike
Magpie	Raven sp
Common Bronzewing Pigeon	Weebill
Grey Shrike-thrush	Buff-rumped Thornbill
Diamond Firetail	

### **Thank you to contributors of articles for recent newsletters**

The introduction of colour late last year seemed to arouse more interest, and we have certainly been able to take full advantage of some great photos. However, at this time of year, material tends to dry up as much as the countryside.

We are always in need of articles, photos, observations, anything related to natural history, especially if of local relevance. If you are more of a photographer than a writer, photo observations with a note of explanation are always welcome. If you aren't yet 'digitised' or can't email them, (at reduced file size please) we can scan a print. We do our best to enhance photos for black and white copy, but we intend to experiment with colour in the near future.

Articles should be emailed in a standard word processor format (e.g., .doc, .docx, .odt, .rtf ) or if handing over hard copy, please type and print on A4 in a basic font like Ariel or Times New Roman (for OCR transfer - saves me re-typing it all) Short notes or observations may be hand-written (provided I can read it!) Pass on to me or any committee member.

-- Editor





At this time of year, our summer visitors, the wading birds, have departed to the northern hemisphere for the serious business of breeding.

But I have heard a couple of reports that the Swift Parrots have returned from Tasmania in the last week or two.

Red necked Stints - N.Y.

## Observations

### At the March meeting -

- ◆ Christine reported that two Tawny Frogmouths have returned to Denis' place in North Castlemaine and can be observed from the kitchen window
- ◆ Geraldine cited an article in the Geelong Naturalist by the Turners, in which they noted that there were more birds seen at their bird bath than they could find in the bush, and that she is noticing the same thing at home at Barkers ck. where the creek has now dried up. Several others reported similar observations - kangaroos and wallabies looking for water as well as birds. Ern was concerned that bush birds attracted into the urban area are likely to fall prey to cats
- ◆ Hans said he and Anne were regularly woken at 4 or 5 am. by large numbers of Lorikeets (Musk?) attracted to nearby flowering Grey Box
- ◆ Chris revisited a property in Sutton Grange this week where there are still numbers of Noisy Friarbirds (they were there last October). They are uncommon in this area. On the same property 30 odd Emus were released in the seventies and there are still at least 11 remaining some 40 years later
- ◆ On a morning walk down Happy Valley track Feb 22, on the start of a hot day, Forest Ck was down to a few waterholes. Lots of birds coming down to one were using a dead tree as lookout post, and in a few minutes there were 13 Dusky Woodswallows, 5 Crested Pigeons, 4 Eastern Rosellas and 4 Crimson Rosellas sharing the tree, with brief stopovers for Wattlebird, Yellow-tufted, New Holland, White-plumed and Fuscous Honeyeaters, Superb blue wrens and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike -- Noel

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists

## Coming events

**Fri April 10 meeting:** Speakers ALBERT & ELEANOR WRIGHT : Birds

**Sat April 11 field trip:** to be decided

**Fri May 8 meeting:** Speaker BRETT LANE on shorebirds

**Fri June 12 meeting:** Speaker JOHN LINDNER on Flinders Ranges

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

### Subscriptions for 2015

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2015 Committee

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